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PSYCHODRAMA: THE STATE OF THE ART

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Psychodrama was one of the first of the clearly non-analytically-based psychotherapies. It was invented by Jacob L. Moreno, M.D. (1889–1974), a Viennese physician turned psychiatrist who emigrated to the United States in 1925 and began to develop his method in the mid-1930s at a sanitarium he established in Beacon, New York, about 50 miles north of Manhattan (Marineau, 1989). Moreno also was one of the pioneers of group psychotherapy and it was he who coined the term and used it at a psychiatric conference in 1931.

Psychodrama involves the integration of imagination and action with verbal expression and self-reflection. Because it involves movement and speech, psychodrama, like drama therapy, can readily integrate the related creative and expressive modalities of dance, music, poetry and art. Thus, psychodrama functions historically and essentially as perhaps the paradigmatic “experiential” therapy. Moreno was very interested in the other modalities and he wrote about and encouraged the utilization of the other creative arts in therapy. For example, one of the earliest articles on dance in therapy by Marian Chace (1945) was published in Moreno’s journal.

The term, *psychodrama*, has become well-known enough to be misused and misunderstood. In news articles or book or movie reviews, emotionally loaded events or productions have been termed *psychodramas*, but, in fact, they miss—or actually are opposite to—the main point: The essential process of psychodrama occurs not in the action itself, but more when the participants in the event can pause, stand back,

perhaps consciously play out some alternative scenes and endeavor to respond to the problem with greater awareness and for the purpose of more authentic and inclusive effectiveness. But the mass media or popular culture tend to portray (as psychodrama) people caught up completely in their roles and suffering the consequences of the lack of self-reflection. The transformative therapeutic process is missing.

Psychodrama, like psychoanalysis, should be thought of in both a specific and more general sense. In its specific, “classical” form, psychodrama occurs generally in therapeutic groups and is characterized by a warming-up process, the selection of a main “protagonist,” the exploration of a problem in action, and a closing process that includes sharing by the group. Most of these require anywhere from one and a half to three hours. In the more general sense, psychodrama refers to a broad complex of methods that include the use of small role-plays, action techniques as part of other therapies, role playing in business or education, sociodrama or the exploration of group problems beyond formal therapy and a variety of other modifications.

And psychodrama ideally should be appreciated as not merely a technique, but rather as a method that operationalizes a philosophy and psychology: The philosophy is based on the central importance of creativity—an idea that becomes even more appropriate as our culture is subjected to the stresses of the post-modern condition. And the psychology emphasizes a number of important elements that can deepen and broaden other psychologies—the values of multimo-

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dal self-expression (and not just by talking *about* a problem), the place of playfulness in adulthood as well as childhood, the dynamics of catharsis (Blatner, 1985), the utilization of physical (body) experience and imagery as well as cognitive insight. A number of therapies have emerged that address one or another of these themes, but Moreno had integrated them as early as the 1930s, with precursors during his formative years of 1908 through 1925.

At present, there are over three hundred certified practitioners in the United States, and an estimated six or seven thousand worldwide (see the section on International Developments). Most psychodramatists are psychologists, social workers, nurses, counselors, with very few psychiatrists—mostly in other countries.

Related Psychodramatic Methods

Although psychodrama is still used in its classical form, far more frequently professionals integrate psychodramatic techniques as warm-ups, facilitating agents or complements, and these may well be used alongside other types of therapy—cognitive, behavioral, family, brief, transactional analysis, Gestalt and so forth. In many settings the term “psychodrama” is deemed to be too easily misunderstood, as “psycho-” is too redolent of psychopathology, whereas “-drama” suggests the histrionics of theatricality. So many practitioners use such terms as “action methods,” “experiential techniques,” “warm-ups,” “role playing” or “structured experiences.”

In addition, psychodramatic methods can be applied in contexts that are at the edge of formal therapy, in psycho-education and in clearly non-therapeutic settings—in business and industry, school classrooms, senior citizens’ centers, adult education and recreation programs, religious or spiritual retreats and so on (Blatner, 1995a; Pitzele, 1995).

One of these modifications is “sociodrama,” in which the focus is not on the challenges of the individual so much as the problem of the group. Another way to think of the difference is that psychodrama addresses the situation of a person whose individuality may be thought of as the nexus of a number of specific roles and role relations whereas sociodrama addresses the problems inherent in the few key roles that are relevant in a group situation, roles shared by a number of the group and affecting the whole. For example, a group leader might explore general themes regarding race relations, gender relations, problems in

ethics or intergenerational issues in their own minds (Sternberg & Garcia, 1989). In the group, dialogues between composite roles can be vehicles for members associating with a position getting up and spontaneously “doubling,” saying those things that tend to remain undisclosed in ordinary life. The greatest value is that assumptions not only are brought into the arena of open discourse, but issues are brought into consciousness that had previously been not fully articulated—those ideas and feelings that people do not even like to think openly to themselves.

Related to sociodrama is “role playing.” In some settings this term is used as an equivalent of psychodrama; yet in general it refers to a somewhat more solution-focused approach. Whereas psychodrama tends to be more insight-oriented and designed to bring into consciousness and expression the underlying attitudes and feelings relevant to a problematic interpersonal situation, role playing tends to be aimed at the finding of a more effective behavioral response. Thus, role playing has been generally used in classrooms—not just for young people, but also in professional or management training seminars (Torrance, Murdock & Fletcher, 1996). For example, a problem situation regarding relations with authoritarian physicians might be relevant to a group of nurses, and the group could explore practical ways of responding that were politically effective. If one of the members gets stuck, others can show how they would deal with it, and still others might disagree and portray another alternative solution. The process of feedback and repeated practice is the most effective way to build skills that can not be acquired through “book learning.”

Role playing also blurs into skills training, assertion training and the simulations that occur in many settings, such as astronaut training, resisting group pressures for drugs, the civil rights demonstrators in the 1960s and even to military “war games.” In part, such approaches reflect the challenges of dealing with complex systems and of building the kinds of skills that cannot be taught didactically.

In this sense, I see role playing as the prime vehicle for developing the kinds of psychosocial skills that are becoming recognized as essential for adaptation to contemporary life. Most of the components of “emotional intelligence” require a process of practice, feedback and support in group sessions (Goleman, 1995).

Psychodrama has also been modified and blended with other therapies. Fritz Perls took the “auxiliary

chair" technique as a major tool for his Gestalt therapy, and from there it has been further modified as the "two chair" method that may be used with cognitive and other approaches. The "family sculpture" technique, first used by Virginia Satir in the late 1960s, is an adaptation of the psychodramatic technique called "the action sociogram." Other psychodramatic techniques can also be applied to family therapy (Blatner, 1994b). Role playing and related techniques are not uncommonly used in a variety of individual and group therapies, including cognitive therapy, multimodal therapy, behavior therapy and so forth.

Theoretical Developments

Much has been done to develop the theoretical foundations of psychodrama since Moreno's own writings, which were really rather conceptually muddy, unsystematic and in other ways problematic. For example, there are now scores of articles comparing (and contrasting) the elements in psychodrama and other forms of psychotherapy. Nevertheless, Moreno was a genius in his recognition of the importance and potential for healing in a number of key concepts. His vision deserves to be appreciated, because these psychological principles lend great depth and power to the application of action techniques. Further discussions of theory may be found in Blatner (1988, 1995b, 1996) or Holmes, Karp and Watson (1994). (These sources, in turn, include many related references.)

It is useful to uncouple the use of psychodramatic techniques from any single theory. These methods can be and have been used within many different general theoretical schools—Jungian, Adlerian, Psychoanalytic, Client-Centered and so on.

One way to appreciate this differentiation is to think of psychodrama as a "praxis," a complex of techniques and the principles underlying their application, yet not quite a single theory presuming to any comprehensive scope. While the basic sciences involve a more purely research approach, the applied sciences involve also a good deal of empirical tradition. Thus, although botany or physiology may be a more purely theoretical endeavor, horticulture or medical practice are examples of a praxis.

Moreno was also a pioneer of role theory, a uniquely American contribution to social psychology, and his most significant contribution, I think, was implicit rather than explicit: The dramaturgical meta-

phor suggests the simultaneous operation of both role performance and self-reflection, the actor who can step back and refine his performance. Moreno himself was a rather casual and unsystematic theoretician, but others, such as Blatner (1991a), Clayton (1994), and Landy (1993, 1994) have taken on the challenge and given it more depth.

Landy's contribution is from the related field of drama therapy (see article by Landy in this issue) and, in the last few decades, greater recognition for the findings in many other fields has extended the theoretical foundation of psychodrama: Courtney's (1990, 1995) writings in drama in education, as well as other innovators in that field; other writings in drama therapy (Emunah, 1994); explorations into creativity; the related approaches of constructivism, personal mythology and narrative psychology in the behavioral sciences; feminism and postmodernism in the general culture (Worell & Remer, 1992); studies of play therapy and the nature of play itself (Blatner & Blatner, 1997); performance, celebration and ritual; group dynamics and group psychotherapy; contemporary trends toward deepening our understanding of the psychotherapy process itself and ways of integrating the best insights of the various "schools" of thought—all apply to psychodrama.

Organizational Developments

Moreno dominated the field until his death in 1974, but in the years following a number of organizational trends emerged. The American Society for Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama (the first organization for group psychotherapy, founded in 1942) was continued, governed more democratically now like most other professional associations.

In the late 1970s, a separate professional certification body was formed, The American Board of Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy, which then established procedures for testing and certifying practitioners and trainers. Prior to the establishment of this element in the field, many people announced themselves as psychodramatists with sometimes the most minimal of exposure to the actual practice—and, unfortunately, these self-proclaimed directors still are quite pervasive.

At present, the training required for full certification includes the possession of a master's degree in one of the helping professions and over 700 hours of didactic or experiential work in psychodrama—enough to ensure a level of maturity and competence.

The examination requires an appreciation of ethical issues as well as knowledge of theory and practice, and observation of actual directing skills is also necessary.*

Although psychodramatic action techniques may be applied in group or family therapy without a great deal of formal psychodrama training, the process of actual "classical" psychodrama does require extensive supervised experience. I think learning to direct psychodramas well is as demanding as learning brain surgery, there are that many variables involved, including a continued commitment of the director's own personal development. Becoming aware of countertransferences is as relevant in psychodrama as in psychoanalysis. So efforts to assure a more professional level of qualifications have been appropriate.

One disadvantage of this certification process, however, has been the neglect or implicit devaluing of those who might apply psychodrama in non-therapeutic ways—for recreation, community development, business consultation, education. In the long run, and especially in light of the imposition of managed care in the therapeutic fields, these extra-medical-model applications—what Moreno called "sociatry"—may well become more significant in the promotion of a more socially healthy culture.

International Developments

While Moreno had promoted psychodrama in other countries from the 1950s onward, and a few professionals pioneered the method in their own fashion, it was only in the late 1970s that various countries began to have enough practitioners, trainers and institutes so that other national organizations began to form. And by the mid-1980s, there were far more psychodramatists in Europe and South America than in the United States. The country with the most institutes (over thirty) and members is Brazil with its federation of institutes. Germany, Sweden, Australia, the Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, England and Israel began to build professional societies, and substantial communities of psychodramatists now exist also in Argentina, Bulgaria, Finland, Japan, Korea, Spain, Russia, Turkey and other countries. In addition to the *Journal of the American Society for Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama*, the *Journal of Group Psy-*

chotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry (Heldref Publications, Washington, DC), there are now journals from Australia/New Zealand, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, and Brazil.

Integrations with Other Approaches

Psychodrama has been desirous of maintaining a separate identity from, say, drama therapy, but, in fact, increasing numbers of practitioners are creating their own syntheses, at times including elements of the other field in their own work. Further, there seems to be a recognition that some patients need more role-distanced therapeutic interventions—playing roles of fictional characters—whereas others need to shift to less distanced enactments, dramas in which they play out the actual situations of themselves and others in their own lives. At times people may start with one category and move to the other type. So areas of overlap and complementarity must be recognized.

Similarly, increasing numbers of workshops as psychodrama conferences involve participants in activities that include techniques derived from or are similar to art, poetry, dance, music or other creative arts therapies. Joint presentations by psychodramatists and drama therapists have become more common. Play therapy techniques, sand tray, puppetry, theatre games and other related activities all become a rich source of ideas and, in turn, other creative arts therapists are more often using action techniques as starters ("warm-ups") and facilitating agents in their work.

These techniques can also be modified and applied in individual, family or couples therapy. The point is to promote the essential themes in psychodrama: Arouse the creativity of the patients through mobilizing their spontaneity and this, in turn, can be facilitated using the playful, as-if context of the drama, along with the evocative power of dramatic devices.

Other Applications

The "mirror" psychodrama technique has been integrated with the context of interactive theatre by Jonathan Fox and this synthesis, called "Playback Theatre," has become quite popular (Fox, 1994). There are now about 100 groups in 22 countries, about half of these belonging to the International

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Playback Theatre Network. In addition, there are also 120 individual members as part of the Network, representing both professional practitioners and interested (nonprofessional) friends.

My impression is that Fox's Playback method, which is often used apart from any therapeutic or psychodramatic context, has reinforced the role of the director as theatrical artist as well as therapist, group dynamics expert and analyst. His use of props has further influenced this aspect of psychodrama practice. And Playback's focus on community applications functions as a type of sociodrama or sociatry, in the spirit of Moreno's earliest experiments with the Theatre of Spontaneity.

Another application of psychodrama is in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because its experiential process facilitates the processing of feelings that generally remain beyond the access of verbal methods. Moreover, the use of dialogue has become an element in a number of related therapies, as direct interchange tends to evoke more spontaneous material and insight than narrative. Of course, in working with trauma, it is essential that a variety of cautions be observed and specific distancing techniques used so the patient does not become overwhelmed or re-traumatized.

Empathy training offers a further potentially major application of psychodrama. Beyond reflective listening, professionals and others who need to develop their empathic capacity may find the framing of the dramatic mode optimal: Using the concept of role as a way of addressing only one dimension of life at a time, people can be helped to imagine what it is like to be in a given role, with all its natural inner contradictions and pressures. Imagination can be cultivated through exercise and, when it is so developed, creative ideas and even insights tend to be far more available to consciousness.

Sociometry

One of Moreno's methodologies was sociometry, a technique for helping people in a group to give themselves feedback about various themes. This technique became more popular in the social sciences in the mid-1950s and has continued as a tool in sociology—and the title of a journal—until the present. Beyond the formal method, it represents a group of principles that deserve continued examination and development. On one hand, I do not think this approach has yet become fully refined; on the other hand, its basic

philosophy and conceptual structure are most relevant and potentially quite powerful.

Psychodramatists are expected to learn about this approach and its implications are rich. One aspect of sociometry is the re-focusing of our theory of psychology so that the sociological and social psychological schools of thought are more recognized, helping to balance trends in psychology toward individualism. Furthermore, the group dynamics addressed by sociometry bring to light that relatively unexplored phenomenon of interpersonal reciprocity that Moreno called "tele" (Barbour, 1994; Blatner, 1994a).

Group Psychotherapy

Psychoanalysis was the dominant ideology in psychotherapy in the 1940s through the 1970s, so psychodrama, along with Adlerian, Jungian and other approaches, were relatively marginalized. Beginning in the 1970s, though, with a resurgence of non-analytic therapies, psychodrama also became more prevalent.

Part of the challenge of psychodrama today is that it continues to be to some extent burdened by "the Moreno problem": Although he was energetic, charismatic, prolific in his writing, and, in fact, espoused a number of brilliant, relevant and far-reaching ideas, he was also reported by many who worked with him to be remarkably difficult. His apparent egocentricity turned many people off. His writing tended to be rambling, self-congratulatory, argumentative, devaluing of the work or character of others and unsystematic. Thus, historians who use his work as the definitive source tend to easily misunderstand and fail to appreciate the essential points. (A more careful critique of the historical resistances to psychodrama may be found in one of the chapters in *Foundations of Psychodrama* [Blatner, 1988].)

New Books

Moreno (and, later, with his wife, Zerka) wrote most of the key books in the field through the end of the 1960s (most notably, Moreno, 1946; Moreno & Moreno, 1959, 1969), but, in the last two decades, a goodly number of new and more definitive books have been published (Blatner, 1988, 1996; Dayton, 1994; Fox, 1987; Holmes & Karp, 1991; Kellermann, 1992; Kipper, 1986; Leveton, 1992; Williams, 1989; Yablonsky, 1992). Also, a number of chapters have addressed the subject in contemporary textbooks (Blatner, 1995b; Corey, 1994; Sacks, 1993). Yet

many authors in other fields still seem unaware of these more recent sources and tend to cite only Moreno's classic books and their historical descriptions are replete with inaccuracies.

Moreno published several journals on topics related to psychodrama, group psychotherapy and sociometry from 1937 through 1974. His earliest, *Sociometry*, was given to the American Sociological Society in 1956. The next began in 1947: *Sociatry*, which, after two years, had its title changed to *Group Psychotherapy*, and in 1970 again changed to *Group Psychotherapy & Psychodrama*. Finally, in 1980, this journal was taken over by the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation (HELDREF), which publishes a number of other journals, and renamed the *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry*, which has been published quarterly since that time.

A more extensive bibliography may be found in Blatner's (1996) latest text, *Acting-In* (3rd ed.) or Sacks, Bilaniu and Gendron's *Bibliography of Psychodrama* (1995), which is also available on computer diskette. The computer revolution is also allowing a growing network of psychodramatists who communicate "on-line" and several "home pages" have been established. (Note, however, that there is a rock group with the name, "Psychodrama," and the topic of "Role Playing" may refer to the Dungeons & Dragons—like hobbyists or, even more misleadingly, advertisements that really involve sexual scenarios and come-ons.) Perhaps in the near future someone will even make a CD-ROM about Moreno, psychodrama and its associated methods.

Nevertheless, there needs to be more writing by practitioners and trainers describing new developments in theory, method and applications. A number of psychodramatists, such as Elaine Goldman and Elain Sachnoff, have been evolving more focused techniques that allow sessions to progress within the time constraints dictated by current economic realities within the health care system. Even more pressing in this regard is the need for scientifically quantified outcome research—a point emphasized by David Kipper, Peter Felix Kellermann, Tom Treadwell and others.

Current Trends

Some of the more exciting current trends include the following:

A number of prominent psychodramatists, such as

Sandra Garfield and Paul Holmes, are promoting an increased level of integration with current refinements in psychoanalytic psychotherapy (Holmes, 1992).

The place of props, fabrics, puppets, cloth "dolls," masks and the like seems to be more widespread, as these "transitional objects" (or, as the Spanish psychodramatist Jaime Rojas-Bermudez calls them, "Intermediate Objects") are being recognized as catalysts of a rich panoply of nonverbal reactions while at the same time offering a greater distance from the actual emotionally-loaded situation.

This also relates to the current trend within the broader field to work with victims and perpetrators of abuse. A variety of psychodramatic techniques have been suggested for helping those who have been traumatized to work through the experience of disempowerment without becoming re-traumatized.

The increased alertness to trauma has a related trend in a heightened concern for making power gradients in therapy, training and life more explicit; addressing ethical concerns more vigorously; and in helping people become more aware of personal boundaries and their subtle violations. (This is also an excellent theme for sociodramatic explorations.)

Psychodramatic methods are also useful (in modified form) for helping people address the depth in ordinary life role transitions. These techniques, as also with drama therapy approaches, may be useful in creating rituals and celebrations. And the drama lends a powerful vehicle for storytelling, helping people in groups feel "seen" as individuals, and, in turn, they become validated as having a story when previously their life may have been experienced as merely a series of events.

"The Art of Play" represents an adaptation of psychodramatic methods for the purposes of recreation, being also a synthesis of elements of creative dramatics and improve, but for the process experience rather than for performance before an audience (Blatner & Blatner, 1997).

Psychotherapy has been accused of simply supporting the status quo by redirecting people's discontent inward. Yet psychodrama and sociodrama can also be used to bring into sharper awareness cultural influences, obsolete myths, unjust stereotypes and other norms, which, if taken for granted, act as agents of psychosocial oppression. Boal's "Theatre of Oppressed" has many areas in common with Moreno's work and, indeed, it is actually coopting a number of these approaches (Feldhendler, 1994).

Summary

The field of psychodrama has continued to grow and evolve with significant refinements in theory and practice occurring since Moreno's own seminal work. His wife, Zerka Toeman Moreno, has significantly developed the methodology, along with scores of other psychodramatists who have added their own significant innovations and applications. New contributions to the professional literature should be read as complements to if not in lieu of the original and prolific Morenian books, monographs and articles (which are, for the most part, out of print or difficult to find outside of libraries). And, most importantly, psychodrama should become a methodology and group of ideas that may be integrated with other therapeutic approaches rather than acting in seeming competition. We are entering an era in which multi-modal and eclectic approaches may be applied with a fair amount of theoretical and intellectual rigor, and the seminal principles of creativity, spontaneity, imagination and related themes expand the scope of the human potential and the nature of healing.

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page book has an extensive index of 30 pages and is also available on either MacIntosh or IBM-compatible computer diskette. (Available from Dr. James M. Sacks, Psychodrama Center of New York, 71 Washington Pl., New York, NY 10011-9184 for \$35.)

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